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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 333. FOR WEEK ENDING MAY 18, 1895. [PRICE ONE PENNY.

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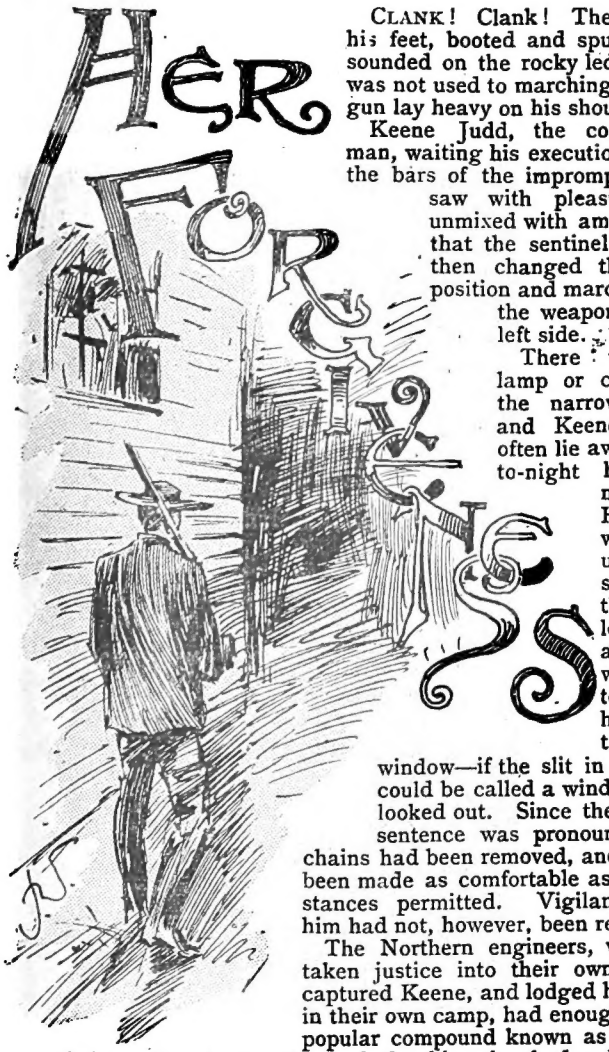
SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 333.] *FOR THE WEEK ENDING MAY 18, 1895.* [PRICE ONE PENNY.



CLANK! Clank! The ring of his feet, booted and spurred, resounded on the rocky ledge. He was not used to marching, and his gun lay heavy on his shoulder.

Keene Judd, the condemned man, waiting his execution behind the bars of the impromptu gaol, saw with pleasure, not unmixed with amusement, that the sentinel now and then changed the gun's position and marched with the weapon on his left side.

There was no lamp or candle in the narrow room, and Keene didn't often lie awake, but to-night he could not sleep. His prison was the upper storey of the small log house, and there was no torch, so he crept to the window—if the slit in the wall could be called a window—and looked out. Since the day his sentence was pronounced his chains had been removed, and he had been made as comfortable as circumstances permitted. Vigilance over him had not, however, been relaxed.

The Northern engineers, who had taken justice into their own hands, captured Keene, and lodged him there in their own camp, had enough of that popular compound known as sand in their anatomy to carry through the thing they had undertaken. All day and all night an armed man walked the narrow ledge of the hillside on which the trappers had thrown the little hut as wasps build their nests on the surface of a side wall. To-night Keene watched him as he paced the length of the prison, watched the figure reverse itself and begin again the patient, persistent promenade.

Presently the guard looked up, aware by instinct that the prisoner's eyes were upon him, and as he did so met Keene's steady gaze. A look of resolution passed into his young features; he nodded, and the condemned man nodded back again.

"It air a fine night," called out Keene, "but it air not a night for sleepin'. I am a fair good sleeper, but not of moonlight nights. Ef you air sleepy now, supposin' we swap places? You come up here en have a nap en let me keep guard. You air young, you see, en need sleep more'n I do."

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John Young laughed cordially in response to Keene's guffaw, but he kept up his regular tread.

"I can't sleep in the moonlight either," he called back, "though it's mighty civil in you to offer to give me the chance. They tell me it's unlucky."

He halted in front of the window, and as he did so he thought of how Admiral Byng took his accustomed dose for the scurvy the morning of his execution. On Friday Keene was to die, and this was Wednesday night; but it wasn't worth while to try and laugh him out of his prenatal and hereditary opinions.

"It air unlucky," said Keene with emphasis. He had come forward and was leaning against the hastily constructed bars. The engineers trusted their prisoner to the vigilance of the guard rather than to the security of the hut. Its single downstairs room had a dirt floor and no window, so they lodged Keene in the upper storey and slept in their own camp under canvas about fifty yards away, under the lee of the hill.

"I guess the idea that it's unlucky," said John, "came from your not being able to see straight in the moonlight. You can't tell your dog from your bird sometimes till you've fired and heard him howl. The fact is, it does make things look out of proportion. Now, this isn't a very interesting place by daylight—just the crooked red road on the edge of the precipice and the mountains piled up all about it; but to-night it's like—well—well, I don't know what it is like."

It might have been created that night for him and Keene. The sky, far lighter than the earth, gleamed with a blue pallor; the moon, a globe of yellow, threw long splashes of light across the eastern heavens, like the light in the tail of a comet, or the rays of a magic lantern, not mingling with the surface colour, but cutting across it as a rushing river cuts through a plain.

On the hillside the trees grew in mass, heavy and dark, but spurs of white rock jutted out at intervals, making rents in the sombre green garment. Above, and on every side, the circling hills rested as billows rest on the crest of the waves, their blue was the blue of a vapour and unreal as things look in the mists of fluctuating shadows; his own, as he caught a glimpse of it, was an armed giant, at whose spectre he started back, listening with quick heart beats.

For the engineers knew that at no moment was Keene secure. Barring the wives, sweethearts and parents of the men whom the freebooter had "got even with"—to use his own expression — the Tennessee mountaineers were not grateful for the foreign interference which was to rid the Gap settlement of its tyrant.

Keene was the most popular man in the district, and at any hour, now that his execution was close at hand, a rescue might be attempted. John felt in his pocket for the whistle whose shrill call would wake his companions sleeping over there in the clump of pines. There were only eight of them, and they had come to prospect for a railway, not to execute lynch laws, but they found that Keene Judd objected to their proposed peaceful employment.

One morning they received by one of his henchmen an ill-spelt letter in Keene's laboured chirography, ordering them to quit or die; but the engineers preferred the middle course. They stayed on and warned him they should fight.

When one of their corps, a young fellow from Louisville, was found dead a few days afterwards, shot through the heart, they set out to keep their word. Their opportunity came rather unexpectedly, and not in the manner most pleasing to

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Keene was sauntering down the road.

adventurous spirits. It was on a Sunday morning, a still October day flooded with sunshine, and Keene was sauntering down the road, a bunch of red berries stuck in his soft grey hat, and dressed in his Sunday suit of blue jeans and long cowhide boots.

But the engineers could not afford to wait for the wily and popular hero to get himself in fighting trim. Keene was a difficult subject, as the photographers say, and would have to be taken on the snap, or not at all. The engineers walked up to him in a body and he threw up his hands. They were empty; so were his boot legs, his pockets, his coat-tails, and his sleeves.

The capturers walked him in their midst into their camp; heard his laconic statement that he "reckoned his time had come," and sentenced him to be hanged within ten days, without evidence, except the gaps in various households, which, it was known, were occasioned by a difference of opinion between the prisoner and the persons who now occupied places in the village graveyard.

John Young (Young John, the other engineers called him) had been hot in the pursuit of Keene, and firm in voting his death. The responsibility of executing a fellow-mortal without the jurisdiction of the law was a heavy one, but, as Virginius said to his little daughter, there was no way but this. Before a jury, Keene could prove a character as spotless as an untarnished shield fresh from the forge. John, therefore, had taken his share like the man he was, for all his sensitive mouth and his quick colour, and for three nights out of seven, for the last week, he had shouldered his rifle and walked between the hours of midnight and 5 a.m. in front of the gaol.

They were going to draw lots for a choice of executioner, but Young John had no idea, did the lot fall to him, of shirking his duty in the matter of hanging Keene Judd. His resoluteness astonished Marion, his chum at college, who had come with him to do prospecting for the new railway, of which John's father, a New York capitalist, was president, and which was to open this remote region to commerce and civilisation.

At college John was a dreamer. He edited the college journal and loved poetry. To see him pacing up and down before the cell of a condemned criminal looked odd. Marion confessedly hated his own job of guard-mounting, and wished the business over every hour of his life.

But though John was going to do his own part he was not the less sorry for Keene. He looked up at the narrow aperture where the tall, superbly-formed figure stood. The moonlight was playing on the bars that separated him from the deep, free woods. Only two more nights of moonlight in which to tempt Providence with eccentric dealings with him. The third would find him sleeping, fast and sound, no matter how brightly it shone upon his upturned face.

Young John put the whistle back into his pocket. No, it was his own shadow of which he was afraid. Afraid—he afraid? He was young enough for the hot blood to mount his cheek at the shaping of the word in his mental vocabulary.

"John!" It was Keene who called out to him as he made his four hundred and fiftieth turn at the corner. "When will the next number of the story paper git here?"

"Next Saturday," said John. He halted again beneath the window, always glad to be civil to his charge.

"That lets me out," said the condemned man despondently. "I'll never know ef that feller catched that gurl or no. I wished it could have come Thursday night. I dunno how it is, but the less time a man air got the heavier it hangs on his han's. I 'lowed es I'd pass Thursday night, which air boun' to be a long night, readin' about Lord Ernest en his vanished bride."

He sighed heavily, and John sighed in sympathy. He said nothing, however, but resumed his march.

"I love ye, John," the prisoner drawled as he passed on. "But I've got my mark on ye, en thet's a pity. Ef ye wasn't so mighty young, John, ye'd be an all-fired powerful man, but ye ain't ever goin' to git your growth. I've got my mark on ye, an' ye will always be Young John."

John laughed; his youth gave him a feeling of security, but the warning quickened his senses.

"Good night," said the prisoner, "I reckon I'll take a mouthful of sleep, es ye ain't so powerful interestin' es to keep me awake," and John renewed his march.

It was nearing midnight. The moon had climbed over the ridge and was riding high in mid-heaven. A white cloud rose from the narrow valley between the parallel lines of mountains—it looked like the veil of a bride, and the river shimmered and gleamed like a girl blushing and quivering beneath her lover's gaze. The dark hills stirred under the sweep of the wind. Down the pass the brow of Greylock shone out like a great knob of silver, a transparent drapery veiled the sky on either side of the path of the moon.

Hark! John arrested himself and stood all attention. Suddenly the twigs of an early frost-bitten bough emitted a cracking sound as if they had been put aside by out-reaching hands. In the clear mountain air, on which even the hoarse calls of the nighthawk fell like the clatter of nails upon a piece of tin, each note, distinct, though clashing down in broken fragments, he heard the approach of stealthy footsteps.

Again he felt for his whistle, though if the rescuer were alone he would risk the encounter. He drew the trigger of his gun and pointed it to the thicket whence the sound came. "Halt," he cried in his clear, high voice. The bushes parted. No rescuer, but a fair young woman stood there. John drew his breath.

She was a tall young woman, and held herself in the simple majesty of one who knows no artificial trammels. Her brown feet were bare, her supple waist, her soft round bust had known no bonds, but the straight gown that had taken the natural lines of her figure and clung to it, as the drapery of the winged goddess of victory clings to the woman beneath it. She had dark, brown eyes, and hair we call a rich auburn, that held the sun's warm rays, even in the pallid moonlight, in a reminiscent fashion. The small, imperious mouth and low brow, the aquiline nose with its delicate nostrils, the flood of warm, bashful colour that flooded her cheeks when the startled youth looked at her in amazement, all bespoke a nature too proud and too modest for her errand.

"Who am I, what do I want?"

She imitated his tone so that the young colour came to his cheek.

"Ef you don't know me, I reckon you ken finc out who I be frum——frum——Mr. Marion."

She started back into the bushes with the offended air of a tragedy queen.

John was about to dart after her, but he remembered his duty. He looked up at the window. Keene had gone back into the room.

"Keene! Keene! Asleep?" he called out, still keeping his eye on the bushes. Keene got up, after a pause, and came to the window.

"What?" he asked.

"No, nothing. I thought maybe you were asleep."

"Well, if ye did think so, I would be obleeged to ye ef ye'd

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keep on thinkin' so. I were asleep for the first time for many a night, en the las', I reckon."

It was the first surly word Keene had ever given him. John felt ashamed. Certainly he had no business disturbing the dreams of a man who had so little time to dream. Keene went back, and trusting to the fickleness of woman, John called softly:

"I say, just one minute. I'm short-sighted, you know; come out into the moonlight—oh, do, please."

The anxiety in his tone had the desired effect. The bushes parted again and the girl stood a few feet from before him.

"Oh," he said; "oh, it is you. I never dared think it was you after the dreadful way you treated me. How in the world did you get here? Did you know I was here? Did you come to see me?"

"I ain't got but one tongue betwixt my teeth," she answered coldly. "I karn't answer all them questions at onct. I live down in the valley miles an' miles from hyer. I walked all night. When ye spoke to me in the valley that day I didn't know ye frum a side of sole leather, an' that other Mister, he larffed, he did," she added with resentment. "I know'd ye was hyer guardin' of Keene Judd. You heard what Keene Judd did to we 'un, I reckon?"

She lifted her liquid eyes to his face awaiting an answer. John nodded; the mist began to clear. He knew too well the modesty and the rustic unapproachableness of the mountain maiden not to be puzzled and astonished at a midnight visit from Serena Hall, the most arrogant beauty in all Shene County. With what scorn she had walked away, not even vouchsafing him a look out of her untamed proud eyes, when he had ventured to offer her a treat of sweetmeats that day in the village; and how Marion had laughed at his discomfiture.

He had a boyish wish that old Marion could see her now, but that was quickly dissipated. He knew by his quick intuition, which was as sure as a divining rod, it was not love of him that brought the mountain Diana into the deep wood by moonlight.

He recollected the well-known killing of Talt Hall, Serena's father, a murder so daring and so open that in any other country the criminal would have been hanged within—well, within five years at least—if he had not proved an alibi, or become insane, or been pardoned. John remembered the law's delays and his back stiffened with renewed resolution.

John caught her as she fell.

"He shot him thar in the corn field," said Serena, "him, a pore ole man, mos' forty years ole, I reckon, an' he died in his sins."

"It air a pity Judd air got so much time to repent," she added passionately. "Likely he will git religion an' die happy an' go to glory, an' them he shot in their sins air in torment. It ain't fair," she ejaculated with fire in her eyes. "It ain't fair, I say. He shan't git religon. Air he got religion yet?" she asked suspiciously.

"Not that I know of," John hastened to answer. "I'm only here at night. I haven't talked to him about—about his execution."

"Yes, I know ye are only hyer at night. I couldn't er come (she blushed and her voice trembled; John felt a thrill pass over him) when the others were hyer, nor that Mister that larffed, an' I didn't mean 'em to know it, not anybody, so I came at night. I wanted to see him. I wanted him to know I was hyer an'—glad." She lingered on the word. "We on the mountains air afeard of Keene Judd, all but me. They air afeard of him hyer in goal, they'd be afeard of his haunt," she laughed scornfully. "They sont word they don't bar no grudge against him for shootin' my father—all but me. But I wan' to see him. I wan' to see him an' tell him jes' once how I scorns and hates him an' how I don't forgive him for shootin' thet ole man down in sight of his wife an' children. He shan't die happy," she called out in a shrill tone that woke the echoes. The uncanny light touched the bare limbs of a lightning-blighted tree. It looked like an animated ghost of vengeance, beckoning with its bony arms.

"Hush, hush," said John, impulsively. "You needn't feel so. It's not right to cherish hatred even for our bitterest enemies."

A soft glow of enthusiasm came over him. It would be sweet to quell that proud spirit and lead it into the higher life.

"He will suffer for his sins soon enough, but not through any revenge of ours."

Unconsciously he had classed himself with her, but the "we," as it fell from his lips, had a tender tone.

"I have not one feeling of enmity to Keene Judd," he added solemnly, "although I am here to see the right done by him as well as by us."

"I shall not res' till I see him," said the girl. "They tole

A fair young woman stood there.

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me he never slep' none lately, but stood up thar at the winder all night long. I wan' jes' one word with him. I wan' say jes' one word. 'Keene Judd,' I wan' say, 'you shan't git religion en go to glory while them you killed is burnin' in fire that is not quenched.'"

"No, no," urged John. "I can't let you tell him that"—he had stepped from the door, and his gun hung slack on his shoulder. "He is asleep, poor soul, for the first time in six nights. I can't wake him. It isn't right—it isn't human to wake him for you to curse him. His guard will be trebled to-morrow night—it's his last, you know, and he'll be nervous, likely; to-night he has only me, and he shall sleep. Besides——"

The girl began to sob. John was not used to hear a woman cry. His heart thumped painfully.

"Ye think—ye think I ought to furgive him; I ought to let him die happy? When he kilt the kindes', bes' old man, an' him in his sins. Oh, I karn't. I karn't."

The noble youth swayed like a young tree in a storm. All the nobility of Young John's nature rose in a leap.

"No!" he cried. "No, Serena, I am not fit to preach to you or to anybody. I am not good myself. But, oh! there is nothing so high, so holy, as forgiveness, nothing half so sweet. If only you will cast revenge out of your heart, right now—cast it out — and, instead of sending Keene Judd word you curse him, let me tell him when he wakes that you came here and sent him your pardon!"

She drew his head towards her.

As he uttered the last words he saw the girl stagger, steady herself, and almost reel.

"It hurts me, it hurts me!" she moaned, "hyer, hyer" (she tugged at her breast), "but—ef ye say I mus'—I will!"

She stretched out her arms, tottered, and John caught her as she fell, clasping him in a close embrace. Tremblingly his lips touched hers. He had not meant it, but the gesture—that unconscious gesture of outstretched arms—he could but obey it. The fair head lay heavy on his shoulder, the beautiful arms were folded about his body. How heavily she lay! Was she dead? He laid his head upon her bosom; he could not feel her breathe, but the heart—it beat tumultuously. He tried to raise her, but she was taller and even heavier than John. She lay like a stone.

"Serena," he whispered hoarsely. He could not call for aid, for her simple confidence in his protection and his secrecy had made her sacred; the other engineers were good fellows, but they would never understand; Marion would laugh, and her good name be despoiled.

"Serena! Wake, Serena!"

The girl had fallen where she stood, some ten feet from the ledge on which the gaol was built. She stirred, like a child asleep. Again he felt the sweep of her encircling arms.

"Ef ye say I mus' furgive him, ef ye say I mus' let him die in peace"—closer and closer she drew his head towards her, that in her maiden modesty she might whisper, though there were no listeners to overhear the dear confession—"ef ye says so, I reckon"—she drew a long breath—"I reckon I mus'."

Keene, who had by this time torn the bars of the window from their fastenings and stepped to the ground as lightly as a down feather floats in the air, had just snatched up John's gun, which had fallen when he rushed to Serena. For one instant he stood as a deer stands in the midst of the forest, all his senses quickened to catch some warning sound ere he bounds into the thicket. He made a quick motion of his hand towards Serena and was gone.

John never knew how long those tender circling arms bound him in an embrace that revealed to him his sudden dearness. A hot blush mounted his face and he tried to draw himself gently from her. Poor child! what had she not told in her overwhelming excitement and emotion!

Like a flash it came over him. His station, education, wealth, her poverty and ignorance. He saw the great gulf, but it was not too wide for his strong limbs to overlap in impetuous generosity.

"Serena!" he was held in a vice. "Serena, no; don't be afraid or ashamed, dear heart; I will protect you." He bent his lips to hers.

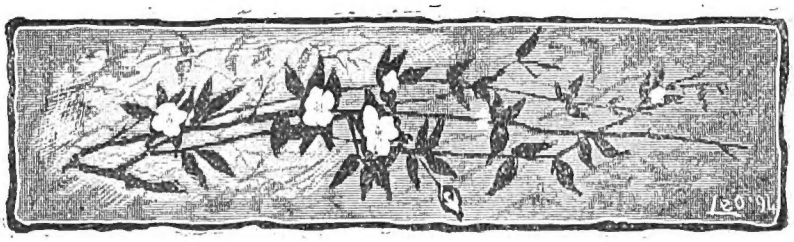
"Ye perteck me!" Serena sprang to her feet. "Me!" The moonlight streamed over her.

"Ye little miserbul weak critter." She rushed forward and pressed him down as he made a bewildered movement to rise. "Ye little mealy-mouthed preacher, ye, with your pious words en your mean actions. You perteck me? I'm Keene Judd's wife, thet's who I am. Does ye think I'd come arfter enny man but my husband? He kilt my dad because he crossed him about my merryin' him. Pick yerself up ef ye know enough. Ye gun?——"

John had got to his feet in some fashion and stood there looking from Serena to the barrel of a six-shooter held on a level with his eyes.

"Keene's got your gun, en you'd es well hunt for some uf your scatterin' brains, ye silly fool ye. Ef them partners uf yours wants to hang ennybody—they can hang ye. Ye'll have to walk down thar to wake 'm to do it, for I've got your whistle."

She brushed the long branches aside, and, like the spirit of the woods, swept out of sight into the deep forest.



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AGAINST LONG ODDS

"SEVEN o'clock, sir. You haven't a minute to spare."

Such were the words that aroused me from a confused dream, in which horses, silk jackets, saddles and bridles were mixed up in indescribable medley. My awakening was sudden, but at the same time complete, for the servant's first words reminded me that I had to catch the ten minutes to eight train to Alveley, and there was consequently no time to "turn over" and indulge in that extra quarter of an hour which is so acceptable under such circumstances.

A glimpse at the weather from a hastily opened casement made me feel inclined to turn into bed again, for in the dim morning light I could see prospects of a wretched day, the air being fearfully cold, while an irritating drizzle was falling sufficient to damp the ardour of an even more enthusiastic sportsman than I.

However, I had given my word to Tom Dunkerton that I would ride for him in the Alveley Open Steeplechase, so, making the best of a bad job and a hasty toilet, I hurriedly crammed a confused heap of racing-breeches, boots, saddle-cloths and odd leads, together with a favourite five-pound saddle, into a capacious saddle-bag, bolted some breakfast, and was soon off through the rain to the station.

My time happened to be some ten minutes in advance of the station clock, the train was a quarter of an hour late, and the station-master seemed to take it as a personal affront that he should have to book a passenger at such an early hour, so when at length I took my seat in the train it is scarcely surprising that I felt on anything but good terms with myself, and entertained uncomfortable apprehensions that everything would go wrong.

Nor was the mission on which I was bound a particularly satisfactory one. Full well I knew that the result of the Alveley Open Steeplechase—of little account, as it was esteemed by the sporting world at large—meant a very great deal at least to one person. My old friend and schoolfellow, Tom Dunkerton, had been having a hard time of it for some seasons past, and, having at length outrun the patience of the Jews, was obliged to "go for the gloves," and had elected to sink or swim by the success or otherwise of his mare Lavinia in the chief event of the Alveley Meeting.

A general favourite with both sexes, Tom was one of those men of whom it is said "they are nobody's enemies but their own." Generous to a fault, of blameless character in all his dealings, and associating only with the better of the county families, Tom had found it impossible to cope successfully with the chicanery and low cunning too often encountered on the turf. Yet, though year by year he found his patrimony diminishing and his estates becoming more and more encumbered, he was unable to drag himself away from its pleasures, and still kept open house in the style which had made the hospitality of Dunkerton Hall a byeword.

"Molethorpe Junction! Change here for Alveley and all stations for the North."

My musings were thus rudely awakened, and I was quickly on the platform with my luggage. There were no signs, however, of the train which I had expected to find waiting to convey us on our journey, so I duly made inquiries on the matter.

"How long will the train be which goes to Alveley, porter?"

"Alveley, sir? It left ten minutes ago."

"What! Do you mean to say that it doesn't wait for the train from the West?"

"No, sir; though that generally gets in first. You see, it was twenty minutes late this morning, sir; and that's how you missed it."

"What time's the next, then?"

"Nothing for Alveley afore twelve o'clock now, sir."

Here was a nice mess to be in. I had so arranged matters that I should be at Alveley before that time, and thus have had a chance of walking over the course, to which I was a stranger. The next train would not land me at the station until 1.30 p.m., the time fixed for the first race, while the Open Steeplechase—in which I was to ride—was set an hour and a half later, so that I was left a very narrow margin, especially if, as had been my experience hitherto, the train failed to keep its time.

However, there was nothing to do but to grin and bear it and heap objurgations on railways in general and branch lines in particular.

Time passes somehow, even at a third-class railway station minus a refreshment room and every other resource of civilisation, and by the time I had read every word of my newspaper, and diligently studied the advertisements on the station hoardings, we were *en route* again. This time we rattled along in fine style, and I mentally shook hands with myself when the train pulled up at Alveley platform at exactly the time appointed—half-past one.

I was quickly out with my bagful of leads, etc., and, in response to a "K'rect kyard, sir, who says a kyard?" from a weather-beaten individual in a fur cap, duly purchased the necessary piece of pasteboard, which was being rapidly reduced to a pulp owing to the adverse nature of the elements.

"How far to the course?" I inquired of this worthy.

"Four miles, captin'; but you can do it in three by taking the cut across the fields."

"Cut across the fields, be hanged! Do you suppose I'm going to cut across fields with this confounded bag? I suppose I can get a cab or conveyance of some kind?"

On this head I was beginning to feel just the least bit nervous. There was hardly a soul about, and going outside the station I found that whatever Alveley might be, town or village, there was no human habitation in sight, except an unimposing-looking structure labelled Railway Tavern.

I inquired for the landlord of this establishment, but again was doomed to disappointment, for both he and the landlady—and, I shrewdly suspected, most of the inhabitants of the place—had gone to the races, taking their only available vehicle with them.

"Can't I get a trap anywhere?" I inquired, despairingly, of the maid-of-all-work left in charge.

"There was some traps, sir, and 'buses met the last train, but they're all on the course by this time. You can have the wheelbarrow to take your things up in, if you can get anybody to push it."

This was evidently my last resource, so, pressing my friend the card-seller into my service with promise of considerable largesse, we started on our long trudge. It was by this time two o'clock, and as we only had an hour in which to cover the four miles, we settled into a good pace, the gentleman in the fur cap keeping up with me by means of a gait which, for want of a better word to define it, I must describe as a shuffle.

Before we had gone a quarter of a mile, however, he had had enough of it. Seated on the handle of the barrow, and wiping the perspiration from his manly brow with his greasy cap, he expressed himself as "dead beat." If he couldn't stay this easy course, how was he to do the four miles?

There was only one way out of it. I was young and in the pink of condition, so, seizing the handles, I took his place between the shafts, and started off at a steady trot, leaving the card-seller limping slowly in the rear.

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According to the ancient saw it is a long lane that has no turning, but I really believed I had found one at last. However, just as my watch showed me it was five minutes to three, I came to a bend in the road, and saw the welcome flags and booths. Shouldering my bag, and shouting to my companion, who was just in sight, to look to the barrow and see me after the next race, I scrambled through a gap in the fence, and arrived on the course just as the numbers were being hoisted for the Open Steeplechase.

Making for the paddock gate, almost the first person I saw was Tom Dunkerton, his face white with despair.

"Thank Heavens you've come, Jack; I thought you were lost. Jump into your things; you haven't a moment to lose. Put Lavinia's number up, Mr. Ashton, will you, please?"

This to the clerk of the course, who, after considerable grumbling, gave the necessary instructions, and No. 9 was added to the others already in the frame. While hastily dressing I found that Goldseeker, an animal well known for his prowess in this description of race, was a raging hot favourite, good odds being laid on his proving successful.

Nor was this state of affairs altogether unjustified, for the big brown was a veritable "Triton among the minnows" in the hunter class. As a two-year-old he had run the subsequent winner of the St. Leger to half a length, and being purchased for eight hundred guineas, after winning a valuable stake at Derby, had—owing, it was supposed, to unsoundness—taken leave of the turf, only to reappear some three seasons later as a duly qualified "hunter."

The others, I found, were mostly local animals of no great pretensions, and if Tom Dunkerton's estimate of Lavinia's merits was not grossly exaggerated, I did not fear much danger from them.

"Now, then, if you're going to weigh out for this race, sharp's the word. Time's up already, and we can't keep the starter waiting all day."

"All right, Mr. Ashton. I'm ready. Put ten-eleven in the scales. His weight's ten-twelve; that's a pound for the bridle."

My mount was standing at the paddock gate, and I was not long getting into the saddle. I had not had time to take stock of her, though she had tried to shake hands with me in demonstrative fashion with her near hind leg as I was re-adjusting the girths.

"Odd's I'll take! I'll take 5 to 2! Eight to one, bar two."

Such were the shouts which greeted my ears as we emerged from the paddock, Tom being at the mare's head.

"You've got something to beat, Jack, but I know you'll do your best. I've got a pot on her, and it's all over with me if it boils over. You must ride your own race, but make the weight tell on the favourite in the last mile."

I answered him as cheerfully as possible, and commissioned him to invest a "tenner" for myself, "just for luck," as I put it.

I had to scurry to the post as quickly as possible, for I could see the white flag was up, and but for the fractiousness of a liver-coloured chestnut, who would not join his horses, I might have been left behind altogether.

A few words of remonstrance from the starter, and I was amongst the others, waiting until the vagaries of the chestnut had worn them out. At length he became more tractable, and with a "Now, turn round! Go!" from the gentleman with the scarlet emblem, we were on our journey.

By this time the drizzle and sleet with which the day began had turned to a storm of snow, and the surroundings were about as unsuitable for a steeplechase as can well be imagined. It would have been impossible for me to make the running had I wished to do so, for I knew absolutely nothing of the course, except that we had to go twice round. The snow made it a matter of impossibility to see from one fence to another, and altogether I began to feel that I should not be sorry when we had arrived at the journey's end.

My first sensation after starting was that I was riding a beautiful mover with plenty of power, and that we were progressing smoothly over ridge and furrow. The next moment, however, and my heart was in my mouth, for at the first fence Lavinia had taken off a shade too soon, and, blundering on landing, had very nearly sent me over her head.

The little mare, however, recovered herself in splendid fashion, and was soon going again, though we had now dropped last, some lengths behind the leaders. We lay in this position over the next two fences, but on the far side of the course a sound piece of grass gave an opportunity of getting on terms, which I quickly availed myself of.

The two leaders were Prospero and an Irish Birdcatcher horse, the pair taking their fences side by side, half a dozen lengths in front of Phantom and Country Boy, while I lay next, clear of the favourite, who was going great guns, the others having already come to grief.

We now came to a very nasty obstacle—a big ditch on the take-off side, with a guard-rail in front and a substantial gorse hedge on the other side. The mare took it with ever so much to spare, jumping in the air as if on a voyage to the clouds. A slight peck, a touch from the spur, and we were righted again and holding our own over the plough.

We were now nearing the water-jump in front of the stand, and, anxious to show to advantage before the spectators, the leaders quickened their pace. Not being used to taking such obstacles at this rate of speed, though clever hunters, both Prospero and the unnamed one came to grief, much to the delight of the rustics, who assuredly would have been greatly disappointed with the sport had there been no falls.

We were now reduced to a quartette. Goldseeker was still pounding away with long, easy stride, making light of his thirty-seven, while Mr. Cunningham, who had the mount, was sitting as much at his ease as if in an arm-chair. The big horse took most of his fences in his stride—a reprehensible habit, I have always thought—and seemed to be merely playing with his opponents.

My mount was still going smoothly enough, and, having acquired confidence, repeated none of the mistakes of the first round. By the determined way she laid hold of her bit I felt I might take a liberty; so, when on the back stretch the second time, I let her out, and quickly established a strong lead. Turning slightly in the shadow I saw Goldseeker quickly pass the other two, and come in pursuit.

We were now again at the open ditch, and I knew if the mare took as long over it as at the first attempt it would seriously prejudice her chance, as we now had less than half a mile to go. Consequently, racing at full pelt, I drove her at it, trusting to luck for her to rise. Crash went the binders, but we went through all right still in possession of a three lengths' lead of Goldseeker, with the others now out of sight.

Next came the turning point into the straight marked by a white flag. Come what might, I had determined to have the inside position here, and so sent the mare along for all she was worth. Mr. Cunningham was also alive to the situation, and, rapidly overhauling me, we jumped the last fence side by side. Perhaps he had underrated the little bay mare after all.

The big horse was now fairly doing his level best. He covered a tremendous amount of ground in his stride, but in this instance that quality proved a drawback, as, being on the outside, his rider was unable to hold him together at the turn, which was very sharp, thereby losing three or four lengths. This cost him the race, for though Mr. Cunningham rode a grand finish, and got to my girths, he could get no nearer, and the judge's verdict was, "Won by half a length."

On returning to weigh in my fingers were so benumbed with cold that I could not take the saddle from my horse, a duty which the trainer had to perform; but after Mr. Ashton had called out a cheery "All right," I was more than rewarded for any personal discomfort I had undergone by Tom Dunkerton's warm thanks and congratulations, and the information that he had taken me £100 to £10 about the mare.

Altogether I found that Master Tom had won between fifteen and sixteen thousand pounds, having backed the mare all over the country at starting price; and for the time his difficulties were at an end.

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A PRIME DUCK

It was the third day of our ocean voyage. The *City of Chester* had slipped her moorings on Wednesday, but it was not until Saturday that I was positively aware of anything except the miserable lurching of the ship and my own woe-begoneness.

During that time I had persistently endeavoured to reach the deck for fresh air, and had been as invariably forced, at short intervals, to seek the seclusion which the cabin grants, so that, when I was not actually seasick, I was practically unable to use my legs or observe anything but the swaying to and fro of my overcoat as it followed, from its hook on the wall, the motions of the vessel, or the meanderings of my bag as it tobogganned across the floor.

But on Saturday I awoke with a start, and was surprised to feel such a gnawing at the pit of my stomach that I instantly rose, and finding my strength of limb increasing in proportion to my hunger made my way to the dining-room, where a few half recuperated-looking specimens sat at breakfast.

Just as I began on my second chop, a cabin door opening into the salle-à-manger closed softly, and two people (a man and a woman) slipped into a couple of vacant seats facing me.

Glancing at them I observed that the lady was remarkably fine looking, yet she carried herself with the air of an invalid. Her hair, which was short, hung in fluffy curls of golden yellow over her forehead and covered even the tips of her ears.

The man? Pah! He disgusted me at once. Seasick and a lover; horrible combination! Evidently they were on their bridal tour, and the groom's head was too unsteady to take his seat without falling over the table.

"My dear," whispered this disgusting creature, "will you have some biscuits?" He looked across the table as he spoke, and, meeting my eye, scowled.

His wife, following the direction of her husband's glance, blushed, and dropped her fringed lids modestly upon her cheeks—not, however, with a scowl.

I took a long time over that breakfast. My appetite was simply enormous, and I was repaid by catching her name (which was Laura) and his (which was Dan).

Rising with a backward glance at my charming *vis-à-vis*, I found my way to the ship's list of passengers. On it were recorded Mr. and Mrs. Daniel La Farge, Chicago.

On reaching the deck I found the captain and a male passenger discussing a remarkable murder and robbery which had been, for some time, creating quite a sensation, and I paused near them, for the matter was one in which I was personally concerned.

It was, in fact, this same business which had caused my hasty voyage to America, for I had received orders from headquarters the day before the *City of Chester* sailed to secure my berth at once, and following certain clues hunt for the missing criminal in New York, which city it was believed he had reached by a steamer of the same line a few days earlier.

"I'll bet £5," remarked the passenger, "that Delibes is still in Liverpool, near the scene of the murder. This flying to the four quarters of the earth in search of escaped criminals is all a mistake. Take the case of Longstreet, for instance——." He paused, meeting my eye, and smiled, including me in the conversation.

"Here's a man," he remarked politely, "who probably never saw a murderer or a detective in his life, but who knows what he's about. Let's have an unbiassed opinion: Where do you think one should look for the villain who, after robbing the Liverpool Bank, got away with his plunder?"

I was about to reply, when, hearing the soft rustle of a woman's garments, I turned, and beheld my handsome *vis-à-vis* at breakfast standing with one hand on the railing of the poop deck. She lingered as if interested, yet fearful of intruding. Daniel was not with her.

"Well," I assented, "you are right, sir, and I perfectly agree with you. The Longstreet case, which we all recall and you were about to cite, is a similar incident."

The Captain, who had been silently listening with his eye upon the fo'castle, smiled with subtle meaning.

"I'm not a betting man," said he slowly, "but I do not object to hazarding an opinion, if you like. I believe that Delibes is——," he hesitated, folded his arms and glanced down at the deck—"on the whole, I postpone my judgment as to his whereabouts."

With these words he turned on his heel and walked towards the stern of the vessel.

As the week passed and we neared the coast, I became more and more fascinated by Mrs. La Farge. There was something especially fetching in the way she eluded me, yet drew me on by a hundred witching coquetries. One evening she had gone so far as to drop her handkerchief at my feet, in passing, yet when I had picked up the delicate piece of embroidery and restored it to her—after touching it to my lips—she had thanked me coldly, and taken "Dan's" arm.

Already, against the horizon, a green strip of land was visible, and the passengers, alert and excited to catch the first glimpse of land, were all on deck.

As I stood at the mouth of the companion talking to Mr. West, the first mate, I observed the Captain descending the steps which led from the poop to the main deck to approach me.

"A word with you, Mr. Z.," said he, murmuring an apology to the mate.

"Well, sir," I enquired curiously, "what is it?"

The Captain's eyes twinkled as he flashed them upon me, exclaiming laughingly:

"You are a prime duck!"

I flushed, too angry to express my astonishment.

"It's none of my business," continued he, trenchantly, "if you choose to look down your nose and allow one of the greatest rascals living to slip through your fingers; but I would advise you to keep your weather eye open."

"What?" I exclaimed. "Whom do you mean?"

"My dear Z——," replied the Captain, "Time is money. I have none to waste. Look at me—be spry! Have we never met before——."

In the light of an awakened idea I scrutinised his face.

"Aha! I see it all! Why, you have shaved off your beard since I got you out of that row with those Italians. But this rascal? Surely you do not mean to tell me that Delibes is in the steerage——."

"Sh!" whispered the Captain, turning on his heel and whistling a tune, but glancing, at the same time, over his shoulder at someone who was leaning over the poop rail.

It was Laura La Farge.

A fresh breeze was blowing, and the yellow curls that fringed her forehead were holding high carnival. From my position below her I beheld one ringlet dance away from her temples, leaving exposed a jagged red scar.

With one bound I reached the upper deck, but I was too late, for Delibes, who realised at once that the game was up, was not a man to suffer the penalty of the law when an easier death lay within his grasp.

Seizing the clinging skirts, which impeded his motions, he darted, like a flash, towards the stern of the vessel, and, ere I could reach him, had climbed the handrail, where he hung for a moment, suspended by his hands.

Then, as I sprang forward, he loosened his hold, and dropped like a log into the foaming water below.

"A man overboard!" I yelled, while on all sides there was an echo of "A lady overboard!" Fast scurrying feet—a wild effort to rescue the suicide, and a continuous threnody from "Dan," who made a brave struggle to keep up appearances.

But Mrs. La Farge was no bungler, either in the art of drowning herself or murdering others. When we found her she (or he) had passed beyond the bars of human jurisdiction.

It only remains for me to add that "Dan" was no criminal, but merely a dummy, hired for the occasion, and that among my intimate friends (to whom this story is familiar) I still retain the sobriquet bestowed upon me by the Captain, of "A Prime Duck."

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THE TENTH OF JUNE.

By John K. Leys, *Author of "In the Toils," "My Hindoo Friend," &c., &c.*

Illustrated by Raymond Potter.

SUMMARY

Geoffrey Dundas—A young barrister.
Sir Arthur Chetwynd—A retired general and Geoffrey's friend.
Leila Chetwynd—His daughter.
Captain Bingham—An army officer, and cousin of Sir Arthur.
Lord Lavington—A friend of the General.
Amavati, the Rajah of Nagore—A Hindoo prince who visits Sir Arthur, and develops an unrequited love of Leila.
Chunder Sen—The Rajah's secretary.
Kuttapani—The Rajah's cook.

During the Indian Mutiny Sir Arthur, together with Geoffrey's father (since dead), took part in the looting of a Hindoo temple on the tenth of June, and on this day every year afterwards one of the Englishmen concerned, or some member of their families, is assassinated. On the last day of May, 1884, Amavati, the Rajah of Nagore, visits Sir Arthur, and Geoffrey tells him of the danger. Sir Arthur on learning from his lawyer that his cousin, Captain Bingham, to whom he had intended to marry Leila, is almost penniless, though representing himself to be rich, wills him but a small annuity. Chunder Sen makes it possible for Bingham to surreptitiously examine the will, and promises to help him out of the difficulty. On the tenth of June, Geoffrey goes to Wales, and is followed by Kuttapani, who attacks him in a lonely spot and leaves him for dead. Geoffrey, however, recovers, and tracks him to a house in Westbourne Park, named Lancaster Villa, which transpires to be the headquarters of the Hindoo. Geoffrey asks the General for Leila's hand, but is refused, and goes abroad. On his return he meets the Rajah outside Lancaster Villa.

CHAPTER XVII.

Friend or Enemy?

The Rajah stood motionless as a statue.

"You are surprised to see me," said Geoffrey, with a grim smile.

The Rajah was evidently disconcerted. Yet his inborn dignity did not desert him. His embarrassment showed itself only in his perfect silence and the rigidity of his face.

"No doubt you believed that I was dead?"

Amavati's face changed.

"Dead? No. Why should I suppose that you were dead? Have you been ill? You do not look in bad health."

"You had not heard that I was dead—murdered?"

"I? No! What has happened? I only returned three days ago from Paris, and have heard no news."

"If you will walk a little way with me I will tell you what happened to me," said Geoffrey, who did not care to remain any longer so close to the Hindoo's house.

After a moment's hesitation, Amavati signified his assent; and without so much as a glance at Lancaster Villa he joined Geoffrey, and the two men walked down the road together.

"First, let me ask," said Geoffrey, "how is that servant of yours, Kuttapani? Is he still with you?"

"Kuttapani?"

The Rajah had stood still, and was looking at the Englishman with wondering eyes.

"Yes. Don't you remember his name? He was with you at Seacombe Towers, in the capacity of cook, I believe."

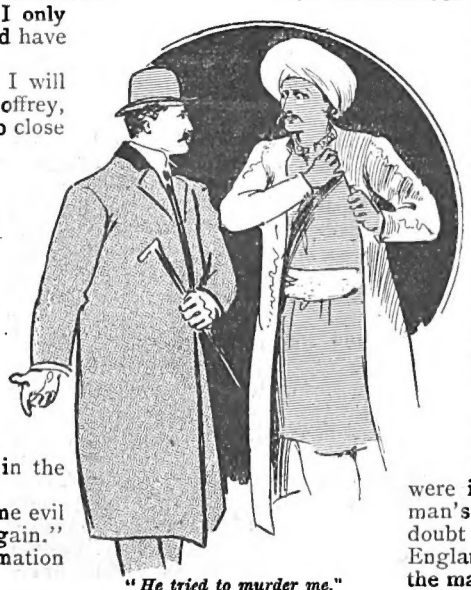
"Kuttapani was lost in London. Some evil happened to him. We never saw him again."

"Indeed! Doubtless you gave information to the police?"

"No. It would have been useless. If he was dead, it could have done no good. If he left us of his own accord, it was to return to India. Let him go."

"He may have returned to India. I hope he has. But you say you lost him in London?"

"When we arrived in London he could not be found."



"He tried to murder me."

"Did you not know that he stayed behind at Bristol?"

"That was most likely, as the train only stopped once on the way, unless he did come to London and hide himself there. But why do you ask so many questions about him? How does he concern you?"

It was not Kuttapani but the Rajah that was the real subject of Geoffrey's questions. He greatly desired to know whether the Rajah was privy to that attempt on his life or not—whether, in a word, he was to look upon him as a friend or a foe. And hitherto he had not been able to gather from Amavati's manner anything that had enabled him to come to a decision on the point.

True, the Indian seemed to be speechless with surprise at the first sight of him; but that might possibly be mere natural astonishment at meeting him in a totally unexpected place. He had also seemed amazed at being questioned about his missing servant; but that was perhaps natural enough. After that first exclamation of surprise, he had answered every query in a very natural, straightforward kind of way.

"My interest in your servant is easily explained," said Geoffrey. "The day after you and I parted at Bristol he tried to murder me."

As he spoke these words the Englishman looked straight into the Hindoo's face. But he could learn nothing there. The start of surprise, the look, half of incredulity, half of horror, were perfectly natural. "This man is innocent," said Geoffrey to himself, "or he is the greatest actor living."

"He—tried—to murder you?"

"And very nearly succeeded. It was, you remember, the Tenth of June. You had recommended me to keep myself secluded on that day, doubtless with good reason. I determined to follow your advice. I went to a secluded mountainous district in Wales.

"On the afternoon of the Tenth of June, your servant, who had secretly followed me, fell upon me from behind, and very nearly succeeded in killing me. I fell into a pool, and managed to make him believe that I was drowned. I followed him to London; but, unfortunately, lost sight of him when we reached town. Since then I have been in America. I wished to conceal from my enemies the fact that I was alive."

"You did wisely," said the Rajah.

"It seems to me you take this matter very coolly!" cried Geoffrey. "This wretched man was your servant. Where did you engage him? What were his antecedents? Who recommended him to you?"

"My secretary might perhaps be able to answer these questions," said Amavati coldly. "I cannot. And I do not see how I can avenge the outrage. If we were in Nagore, and Kuttapani—is that the man's name?—if he were taken, I might no doubt have him executed. But we are in England. I have no power here; and, besides, the man has escaped."

Geoffrey made no reply. Apparently the Rajah was unconscious of Geoffrey's suspicions; and the young Englishman shrank from charging him with complicity in Kuttapani's crime. Yet he could not forbear saying something.

"You are going to Seacombe Towers next month, I believe?"

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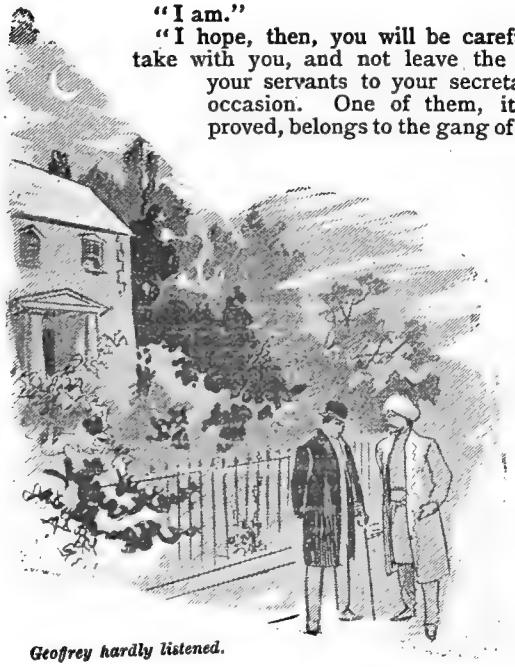
"I am."

"I hope, then, you will be careful who you take with you, and not leave the selection of your servants to your secretary on this occasion. One of them, it has been proved, belongs to the gang of murderers; and I know that the General has special reason to fear them. I cannot help telling you that I regard it as an unfortunate coincidence that you are to be under the General's roof on the fatal day."



Geoffrey hardly listened.

During this speech the Rajah had drawn himself up to his full height, and he was now regarding his companion with a cold, proud gaze, in which there was more of contempt than anger.

"Perhaps you think I would procure the assassination of my host?"

"I have not said so. Nor do I think so. But I distrust your servants—and with reason."

"Sir, the warning was not needed; but it shall not be neglected."

"Can you not choose some other date for your visit?"

For answer the Hindoo darted a strange look at Geoffrey.

"Would it surprise you to know," said he, "that one whom I believe to be the General's enemy has presumed to make the same suggestion to me?"

"The General's enemy? Who is he?"

"I cannot tell you."

"If you were a true friend of the General's you would tell me, and you would tell him too!" burst out Geoffrey. "You know that danger threatens him; yet you will not denounce his would-be murderer, nor even give him warning!"

"You are mistaken," said the Rajah, with the same air of cold, proud indifference. "Sir Arthur knows that his life is in danger every Tenth of June. He has long known it. His enemies—your enemies—would not be turned from their purpose if I were to denounce one, against whom I have no direct evidence. And he can do no more for his own protection than he has already done. I can do no more for his safety than I have done already—or, rather, it is not in my power to do anything."

Geoffrey hardly listened to these protestations. His mind was busy with conjectures as to the meaning of what he had just heard. Supposing Amavati to be speaking the truth, why should the conspirators wish the Rajah to be *absent* from Seacombe Towers on the coming Tenth of June? Did not the very expression of such a desire on their part betoken danger to the General or to Leila, or to both of them on that day?

The two men had turned, and were now walking, almost unconsciously, in the direction of Lancaster Villa. Amavati, as well as Geoffrey, was silent.

"I wish to ask you one question," said the Rajah, at length. "You need not answer unless you choose. Is the young lady, the daughter of Sir Arthur, promised to you in marriage?"

Geoffrey gave a short, bitter laugh.

"No," he said.

"Is she promised to that Captain, her cousin, or to any other man?"

"So far as I know, she is not."

"If she were, I might make some excuse to Sir Arthur, and give up my visit. But since it is otherwise, I hope to persuade her father to give her to me. Therefore I will go to his house as we had arranged."

"Could you not alter the date?"

"No, I have other visits to pay; and I leave the country finally in August."

"Why should you think of denying yourself the pleasure of this visit?" Geoffrey was tempted to ask.

"Because you were unjust enough to suspect me," said the Hindoo coldly; "and it is possible that the General may suspect me also. But since my purpose may yet be accomplished, I will not allow myself to be turned aside by your suspicions—of which you ought to be ashamed." This was said in the cold, even tone which the Rajah had used throughout.

"Ashamed!" cried Geoffrey. "If it were not that I can hardly believe that a man of your rank and character could lend himself to such a plot, my suspicions would be something like certainties. Not only does your servant, who could have no personal malice against me, try to murder me, but I find you, alone, and on foot, haunting the very neighbourhood in which the murderer was last heard of. And what is more, I find you in the act of entering the house which was, and I believe still is, inhabited *by the man who tried to poison me two years ago.*"

Geoffrey had purposely kept this parting shot for the last; and he looked keenly into the Hindoo's face that he might see the effect of it. Amavati's habitual gravity was not disturbed; his face was rigid as that of a statue; yet there was a something, a marked avoidance of the Englishman's eye, an evident effort at self-control, which told its own tale. And, above all, he did not trust himself to utter a word. Geoffrey was determined to taunt him into speaking.

"I think you will admit that these things would be enough to justify suspicions in the minds of most men," he said.

"I know you suspect me," said the Hindoo calmly. "It does not greatly concern me. You may think what you choose."

"I have little doubt," said Geoffrey, stung by the cool indifference of the man, "I have little doubt that Sir Arthur Chetwynd will see the thing from the same point of view as I do, when I mention the full circumstances to him."

"That I would stain my soul with treachery like this."

The Rajah's calmness vanished as if by magic. He turned half round, and grasped his companion by the arm.

"No!" he said, in a low, earnest whisper, "do not do that. Do not tell Sir Arthur that you have seen me here. He, too, would interpret my actions wrongly. You would fill his mind with the most unjust, the basest suspicions.

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You cannot really believe that I, a prince of royal blood, would stain my soul with treachery like this?—treachery against my host, against the father of the lady who may be my bride!"

"No; I cannot believe it," said Geoffrey; and yet—if your highness would explain——"

"I cannot explain further than this—that I may have occasion to use these men as my tools. I will not permit them to attack Sir Arthur."

"You wish to make them your tools; they may succeed in making use of you," thought Geoffrey to himself, but he did not utter the thought aloud.

"You will not tell Sir Arthur where you saw me to-night?" demanded the Rajah.

Geoffrey hesitated a moment. Then he reflected that he might put the General effectually on his guard without revealing the precise fact which had seemed to him so suspicious; and he answered, "No, I will not."

"I see you trust me, and I thank you," said the Rajah in his old proud manner.

By this time they were not far from the Hindoo's head-quarters.

"Are you going to that house—the house of the assassins?" said Geoffrey significantly.

"Yes, I am," was the answer.

"Then I must trust you not to betray *my* secret. As I told you, my enemies believe me to be dead. In that belief lies my safety; for it is war to the knife between these men and me. If you reveal to them the fact that I am alive, you seal my death-warrant—at least, you make it certain that they will make a third attempt on my life; and I could hardly hope to escape a third time. May I rely on you not to mention my name to them?"

In his turn the Rajah seemed to hesitate.

"I will say nothing," he said at last; and without another word he was gone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GEOFFREY PLAYS THE SPY TO GOOD PURPOSE.

IT was with very mixed feelings that Geoffrey walked slowly back to his rooms, after parting with the Rajah. He had not been able to come to any decision on the question whether Amavati was to be trusted or not. In spite of appearances he was inclined to trust to the prince's honour, and under ordinary circumstances he would have done so without hesitation; but the matter was not one in which he ought to run any risk.

Sometimes he felt tempted to regret that he had not gone into the empty greenhouse, on the chance of overhearing what passed between the Rajah and the Hindoos who inhabited Lancaster Villa; but at the time he had shrunk from doing so. Considering what had passed between Amavati and himself, it had seemed like an act of treachery. Later he consoled himself with the thought that he had lost nothing through his honourable scruple.

Without another word he was gone.

Even if the Hindoos had held their conversation in the room at the back of the house, it was certain that they would talk in Hindustani, of which language Geoffrey only understood a few words. He wished

"Where is Lancaster Villa?"

now that he had gone to India, instead of to America, and learned Hindustani; but it was too late to repair that error.

For some days Geoffrey did nothing beyond writing to Sir Arthur Chetwynd, advising him to be doubly on his guard, since he had reason to know that the Rajah's conduct was not free from suspicion.

Bitterly did he regret that the foolish promise he made to the Hindoo prevented his speaking more plainly; but he did not by any means feel sure that if he had told the General all he knew it would have made any difference. The old Anglo-Indian would have required not suspicion merely, but the strongest proof of intended treachery, before he would have consented to shut his door in the face of an invited guest.

That which chiefly perplexed Geoffrey was the absence of any indication as to what his enemies' plans were, or what steps he could take to secure the General's safety. He held one or two consultations with his friend Linton; but these conferences led to no result. The Hindoos were working, if at all, underground. Nothing, apparently, could be done till they chose to emerge into the light of day.

One evening, not long after his encounter with the Rajah, Geoffrey, following a vague impulse, walked out in the direction of Lancaster Villa. The evening was gloomy, and it was nearly dark.

As he passed along one of the more frequented thoroughfares, a voice fell on his ear that he thought he recognised. He turned his head sharply round. A stout man, who had evidently just alighted from a hansom, was squabbling with the cabman over the fare. Geoffrey drew a few steps nearer. He had not been mistaken. It was Captain Byngham.

The dispute was suddenly ended by the Captain turning on his heel and walking down a side street, while the cabman, grumbling and cursing, put his horse in motion, and slowly disappeared.

Geoffrey hardly knew whether he ought to speak to Sir Arthur's cousin. He had a strong, natural antipathy for the man; yet it seemed unneighbourly to let him pass without accosting him, since they had been on quasi-intimate terms at Seacombe Towers. "Besides," thought Geoffrey, "he may be able to give me some news of the General."

He hurried after the Captain, and had nearly overtaken him, when he saw Byngham suddenly pause. He had met an errand-boy, and stopped him, with the question—

"Where's Lancaster Villa?"

A kind of nervous horror stole over Geoffrey Dundas, as these common-place words fell on his ears. Was he dreaming? What could this Yorkshire squire want with those crafty Hindoos? What kind of net could they be spreading for the General's feet, that caused them to summon first one and then another of the old veteran's friends to their aid?

At first it did not occur to Geoffrey to suspect any sinister motive on Byngham's part. It was not until the Captain had moved on, and Geoffrey found himself unconsciously following him, that the question forced itself into his mind. Can the Hindoos have been using Byngham as a spy upon the General's movements? Is he coming here to report to them?

Even then he did not think of Byngham as being consciously a traitor. He imagined that the Hindoos had found some way of hoodwinking the Captain; he did not suppose

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for a moment that the Captain knew of the existence of a plot against his kinsman.

It seemed, therefore, to Geoffrey that it would be a good thing to question Byngham, and put him on his guard; and he was in the act of mending his pace to overtake him, when it struck him that it might be as well to delay speaking to the Captain until he returned from visiting the Hindoos. It might be of the greatest importance to learn what questions the conspirators had been asking, and what information they had obtained.

"Possibly," thought Geoffrey, "this may lead to my discovering the manner as well as the time of their attack. Fortune has favoured me for once."

He therefore allowed Byngham to enter the gate leading to Lancaster Villa without making any effort to detain him; and he began slowly to pace up and down the road, so that he might not miss him when he returned.

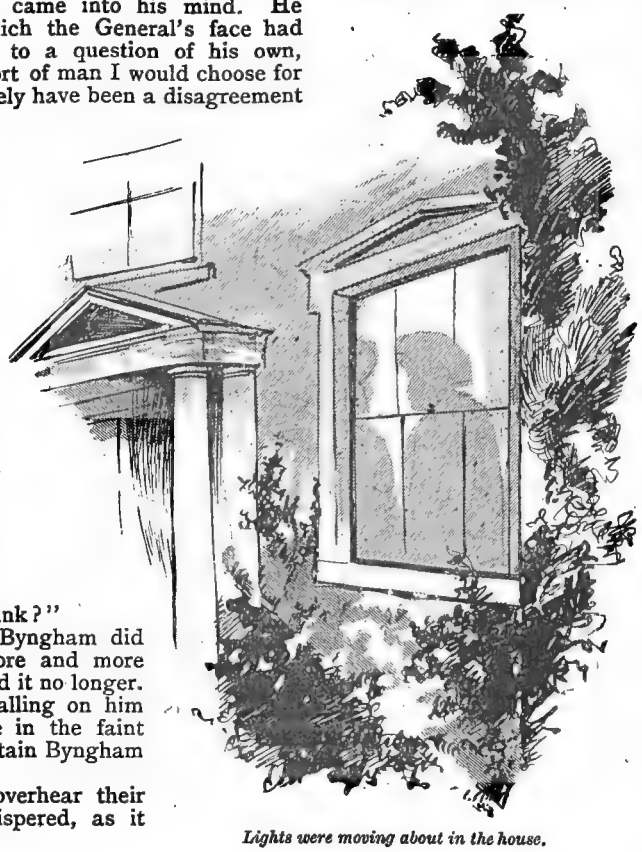
As he sauntered to and fro in the empty roadway, fresh thoughts, unpleasant thoughts, came into his mind. He remembered the expression which the General's face had worn when he said in answer to a question of his own, "Captain Byngham is not the sort of man I would choose for my son-in-law." There must surely have been a disagreement of some kind between the two men.

"Supposing," said Geoffrey to himself, "that Byngham proposed to Leila and was rejected, or suppose the General forbade the match, that might stir up bad blood between them. I rather think the Captain is a vindictive kind of fellow . . . . It is *very* odd that *he* should be consorting with the General's enemies."

Following this came a fresh wave of suspicion. He felt that he could not trust the Captain to give him a true account of what was passing in that silent house. He might very well refuse to answer any questions on the subject. "And then," Geoffrey asked himself, "what should I do? What must I think?"

As the minutes passed, and Byngham did not return, Geoffrey became more and more uneasy, till at last he could stand it no longer. An inward voice seemed to be calling on him to act, instead of waiting there in the faint hope of being able to induce Captain Byngham to be frank with him.

"Why should I not try to overhear their conversation?" something whispered, as it were, in his ear.



Lights were moving about in the house.

At first he repelled the suggestion, as an honourable man would be sure to do. But it recurred to him again and again.

"Why," urged this persistent monitor—"Why should I allow a scruple, natural and proper enough under ordinary circumstances, to hinder my trying to save the General's life? If this Byngham has not gone over to the side of Sir Arthur's enemies, why should he be visiting them? The Rajah might have twenty good reasons for wishing to call upon his fellow-countrymen. I can conceive of no such reason in Byngham's case. And now I remember, he seemed to be on anything but friendly terms with the Hindoos who were at Seacombe Towers. He must be up to some rascality, and the sooner I find out what it is the better."

This last thought decided him. He walked rapidly to the gate leading to Chester Villa, the house which adjoined Lancaster Villa. It did not strike him as curious that the gate was unlocked. He was proceeding up the garden path, when he suddenly stopped short in consternation.

Lights were moving about in the house which he had supposed to be empty. He cautiously drew a few steps nearer. Some of the windows were fitted with curtains and blinds. There was no doubt about it. The house was inhabited. The house-agent, who had promised that he should have the first refusal of Chester Villa, had let it without informing him.

What was to be done? Go back to the road, and wait there for Byngham, or push his way on to the conservatory, at the risk of being locked up as a housebreaker? Geoffrey hardly took a second to decide. Keeping as much as possible in the shadow of the laurels, he made his way round to the back of the house.

Here all was quiet. Oddly enough, there was no light in the kitchen windows. Geoffrey moved slowly forward to the door of the conservatory, and felt for the broken pane. It was there. He opened the door and went in. The dim reflection from the glass roof, showed him that the shelves were all but empty. It seemed as if no one had been there since his last visit, nearly twelve months before.

Hardly had he began to move along the narrow passage, when the sound of voices on the other side of the wooden partition became audible. Rapidly, yet without the least noise, Geoffrey moved to the spot, from which he had once before gazed into the interior of the Hindoos' dwelling.

He mounted to the required height, and found that when he bent his head forward till it rested on the partition, he could hear distinctly the words spoken. He could distinguish the voices easily. One was that of Byngham. His heart gave a great throb when he recognised the other voice. It was that of Chunder Sen!

"You see, you can hardly fail to win the lady's heart," said the Hindoo, in his soft silky tones. "Common gratitude would make her willing to marry you. You become her protector. You rescue her from a position of the greatest danger, at the risk, apparently, of your life."

"That's all very well," broke in the gruff voice of the Englishman, "and I don't deny that it sounds all right as far as it goes. But you forget that what is wanted is her father's consent. Without that I don't want to marry the girl—at least, it would hardly be worth my while, as she would lose all the money."

"My good sir, *I* forget nothing. You have overlooked the most important result of all. You and the lady are thrown together under circumstances of—of what shall I say?—of great delicacy, in a foreign country, with no one of your friends near. There is nothing to prevent you keeping her there as long as you wish. You may practically compel her to marry you; and of course, for the sake of the lady's reputation, and to prevent a scandal, the trustees, as you call them, will gladly give their consent."

"The trustees! Why do you say the trustees? As long as Sir Arthur lives, it is for him to give or withhold his consent."

"True. Well; let us say the General. The same motives would apply to him—gratitude for saving his daughter, and the wish to prevent anything like a breath of scandal approaching her name."

"The General is not so easy a person to deal with."

"I think you may rely on it that he will give you no trouble."

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Geoffrey's blood ran cold as he heard these words. Did Bungham attach the same sinister meaning to them? Apparently not, for his next words were spoken in the same cool, unconcerned tone as before.

"I shall need some men to help me."

"It is not at all necessary. You have nothing to do but hire a house——"

"What's that?" cried Bungham, sharply.

That was a curious, rasping sound on the other side of the partition.

Geoffrey, in his anxiety to catch every word that was uttered, had bent forward till his head and hands rested on the lower edge of the aperture in the partition.

The narrow shelf on which he stood, was at some little distance from the wall, and in his eagerness to hear all that was said, he had forgotten that his footing was rather precarious. He had, in fact, slightly over-balanced himself; his hands had slipped, and made a scraping noise on the wooden surface. His heart leaped, so to speak, into his mouth, and he remained perfectly still.

"There's a hole up there!" he heard Bungham exclaim.

"My dear sir," replied Chunder Sen, "you may make your mind perfectly easy. The house next door is empty—or rather, it is in the occupation of our friends, some of whom fancied that we were liable to be overlooked by anyone who might take it. They, however, cannot understand a word of English, so that even if one of them happened to be in the adjoining conservatory, which is most unlikely——"

"But the noise! I distinctly heard a sound, as of a something rubbing against the wall, just over our heads. You must have heard it."

"Yes, I heard it. It must have been a mouse or a rat."

"All the same, I mean to have a peep through that hole in the wall."

Geoffrey had not moved, hoping that the conspirators would go on with their conversation. But now he gave himself up for lost. He heard the Captain spring from his seat, and begin dragging a light table, or some other article of furniture, towards the partition.

What was to be done?

To get out of the greenhouse in time was impossible. There was no time to think, much less to act.

Suddenly he heard a crash.

The table to which Bungham had trusted his weight had overturned.

"What's that?"

In another instant Geoffrey had softly descended to the floor, and was moving swiftly but silently to the door.

Gently he turned the handle, and crossed the threshold. But he had hardly taken three steps from the conservatory than he went back, closed the door, and passing his hand through the broken pane, turned the key in the lock. Then he retreated to a thick clump of bushes that grew close by, and waited.

In less than half a minute, a soft step was heard on the gravel; and Geoffrey, peering out from his hiding-place, saw the portly form of the Rajah's secretary come round the corner of the house. Chunder Sen went up to the conservatory, and tried the door. Then, apparently, he discovered the broken pane, for Geoffrey heard him open the door, and go inside. In a minute or two he re-appeared, locked the door behind him, and returned by the way he had come.

Saw the portly form of the Rajah's secretary.

He waited just long enough to give the Hindoo time to make his way back to Lancaster Villa, and once more stole cautiously into the conservatory.

But now no voices fell upon his listening ears. All was dark and silent as the grave. He waited some time; but not a sound was to be heard. In his desperation, Geoffrey tried to get into the adjoining house, Chester Villa, by the French window opening into the conservatory; but it was securely fastened.

There was no more that he could do. He left the conservatory, once more locking the door behind him, and went round to the front of the house.

In one window a faint light burned; the others were dark. A thick privet hedge separated the front gardens of the two houses; and it suddenly occurred to Geoffrey that if there happened to be a similar hedge on the other side of the front garden belonging to Lancaster Villa, he might possibly, by standing behind it, catch a word or two of what might pass between Bungham and the Secretary when they parted.

Geoffrey went round to the other side of Lancaster Villa, and found, as he had expected, that a hedge separated the front garden from the ground belonging to the house on the further side. That house was occupied; but Geoffrey was beyond caring for a trifle of that kind. Only, he hoped that the people who lived in it did not keep a dog. Fortunately they did not; and Geoffrey was able to take up his station within two yards of the street door of Lancaster Villa.

For fully a quarter of an hour Geoffrey waited there, in perfect silence. He heard ten o'clock strike from a neighbouring church-tower; and shortly afterwards the rattle of a door-chain was heard, and the door of Lancaster Villa was softly opened.

Listening intently, Geoffrey could just make out the low tones of the Secretary's voice, as he whispered—

"Remember what I told you."

"Oh, I'll remember. The Tenth of June. That's it, isn't it?"

"Hush!"

And, to Geoffrey's intense disappointment, the Hindoo drew the Englishman back, inside the door, as if to give him some parting instructions. It was impossible to hear another word.

A few seconds later the door was opened again; the Captain said "Good-night," descended the steps, and strode down the garden path and out into the roadway, banging the gate behind him. Little did he imagine, as he walked rapidly along towards the heart of London, that Geoffrey Dundas was quietly following him, not fifty yards in the rear.

(To be continued.)

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CARRIE'S BLUNDER

"I LOVE her, mother," cried Guion Esterhall.

He was not, in a general way, much of a talker. Consequently, when he spoke, his words had the weight of sense and rarity. But Mrs. Esterhall, the fine old lady who sat erect before the fire, was too much excited to consider all this.

"The wife of my son, Guion," said she, "should be a lady, born and bred—not one of those girls who have to fight the world until all gentleness, grace, and unselfishness are ground out of them. No, I can never give my consent!"

The young man smiled slightly.

"Mother," said he, "the diamond itself hardly possesses its true financial value until the facets are ground with much friction."

"Humph!" said Mrs. Esterhall. "No one is talking of diamonds."

"I may bring her to see you, mother?"

Mrs. Esterhall shook her head.

"I have no desire to receive her," said she. "But, Guy, here are the tickets for the Lyceum to-night. Carrie Chippendale has promised to accompany me—of course, you will be on hand at half-past seven to be our escort?"

"If you wish it, mother."

The old lady smiled to herself when Guion was gone.

"A little management," she thought, "a little judicious firmness, and Guy will get over this boyish fancy of his. The idea of a shop-girl for my daughter-in-law—for Mrs. Guion Esterhall! I think the lad must have taken leave of his senses."

And in her secret heart she rejoiced with an exceeding great rejoicing when Miss Chippendale arrived that evening, got up in the most elaborate style.

"If we are to have a private box," said Miss Chippendale, buttoning the seventeenth button of her glove, "one may as well go in full dress, don't you know."

"My dear, you are looking lovely," said Mrs. Esterhall approvingly.

Miss Chippendale was a sort of human camellia—fair, graceful, and serene—with big, expressionless blue eyes, cherry-red lips, flax-gold hair, drawn in fluffy crimps over her forehead, and an unchanging Society smile perpetually about her lips.

She had been highly educated, and she was destined by her parents to make a brilliant match. The Chippendales belonged to the upper ten—that is to say, they had never done any work, and had always spent a great deal of money. And Mrs. Esterhall had decided that Carrie Chippendale was the very wife for her son.

If only she could convert Guion to the same opinion.

Guion Esterhall was exceedingly courteous to Miss Chippendale that evening, but not a whit more so than he was to his own mother. The old lady was somewhat disappointed.

"But never mind," she said to herself, "one must have patience."

She went shopping the next day, to match a shade of Berlin wool, to buy some lace flounces, and to decide on new *portières* for her drawing-room down at Esterhall Manor. At two o'clock she experienced, not hunger, but a ladylike sensation that "tired nature" needed some sort of "sweet restoration."

"I will go into Maricotta's," she thought.

Maricotta's was full, as it generally was at that time of the day; but presently the old lady succeeded in obtaining a seat in a curtained angle, where the waiter took her order for a chicken-salad and a cup of tea. Just then she heard a clear, low voice on the other side of the curtain, as a party settled themselves at a reserved table—Miss Chippendale's soft, well-modulated tones.

"Oh, yes, Irving was very fine," said Carrie. "Oysters, please—stew for one and fritters for two and three cups of Vienna chocolate, nicely frothed, waiter. But all the same I nearly died of *ennui*. The old lady is the most dreadful bore you ever knew, and Guy is a regular prig. Handsome, you know, and very talented, of course; but one doesn't want to be on full dress parade as to one's brains the whole time. He isn't half as nice as Freddie Fortune—only poor dear Fred hasn't a penny to bless himself with, and papa looks thunder-clouds at me whenever he calls. But once I'm married, it——"

A chorus of well-bred giggling interrupted Carrie's words. Mrs. Esterhall rose hurriedly from her seat, grasped her gloves and eye-glasses, and made all haste out of the restaurant. When the waiter came with the chicken-salad and the tea, he found his customer gone. The unconscious Miss Chippendale and her friends enjoyed their Vienna chocolate and oysters very much indeed.

Mrs. Esterhall decided to return to the manor at once. Carrie Chippendale's graceful treachery had affected her more than she had deemed possible; and leaving a hastily written note to explain to Guion that she had altered her plans, she took the late express, which reached Clevedon Junction at nine, there connecting with a branch train for Esterhall Station. She was travelling alone, as her maid remained to pack up the last things, and follow her the next day.

There had been a heavy snowfall, the night had settled down dark and tempestuous, and the train was behind time. At last it came to a full stop. Mrs. Esterhall started from a doze, and looked anxiously around her.

"Ten o'clock!" someone said, consulting a watch. "Why, guard," as the man's head appeared at the window, "we are due at Clevedon at five minutes before nine!"

"Yes, I know, sir," spoke the official, "but the line is all blocked, and the T— Express is overdue at this point. We're waiting here for the signal to move on."

"And what's to keep us from waiting all night?" petulantly inquired the old gentleman.

"Nothing sir— unless the express comes along."

Mrs. Esterhall began to be a little frightened.

"Guard," she said, "is there any danger of a collision?"

"No, ma'am—not as long as we are on this siding."

Slowly the minutes dragged themselves by, gradually lengthening into hours. One or two of the more adventurous spirits among the passengers got out, peered into the darkness—flecked only by the driving snow—and then got in again with the customary uncomplimentary comments on the railway management. Mrs. Esterhall was nervous, and unaccustomed to travel alone. She began to cry softly behind her veil.

"Ah!" she thought, "if ever I live to get safe home again, I'll stay there. I'll never tempt Providence again on these night journeyings."

On the opposite side of the compartment two young girls were seated—the one pale-faced and rather plain, as Mrs. Esterhall had already noticed, the other a brilliant young brunette, with soft hazel eyes, peachy cheeks, and wavy dark-brown hair brushed carelessly back from a low, broad forehead. Presently the latter bent forward towards Mrs. Esterhall, and asked in a soft, sympathetic voice:

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"Are you ill, madam?"

"N—no!" stammered the old lady, quite forgetful of her Society dignity. "Only I am so faint and weary. I expected to dine at home long before this hour; and I took almost nothing to eat before I started."

"I have some nice chicken sandwiches in my bag," suggested the pretty girl. "My aunt insisted on my taking them, although I dined heartily before leaving home; and I have a little spirit lamp with every convenience for making a cup of good, strong tea as well. If you will allow me to prepare it for you——"

Mrs. Esterhall was a genuine tea-maniac. A new brightness came into her eyes at this suggestion.

"You are very kind," said she. "But you will want it yourself?"

"No," smiled the girl. "I don't care for tea. But my kind old aunt would put the things in. Now I am glad she did so."

In five minutes Mrs. Esterhall had eaten and drunk, and felt infinitely better. How it happened she did not question herself, but she presently found herself reclining comfortably with her head on a pillow improvised out of the folded blanket shawl that belonged to the young girl; and, mingled with her drowsy reflections, came the soft, low murmurs of the sweet-eyed brunette, who had changed her seat and that of her companion to the one directly opposite Mrs. Esterhall, and was talking almost in a whisper.

"No, I am not going back; and I do not intend to communicate my address to anyone."

"Not even to him?"

"No, not even to him."

"But he loves you, dear."

"Yes; and that is the very reason I am determined to create no dissension between him and his friends. Perhaps he will forget me."

"He will never do that."

"But at least I shall feel that I have done my duty," said the hazel-eyed girl firmly.

"I shall love him to the end of his days, but I shall not have ruined his future."

"And all this," cried the companion, "out of deference to the whims of an old woman whom you have never seen!"

"Out of deference to his mother, Alice," gently corrected the first speaker.

"What a quixotic notion," dreamily mused Mrs. Esterhall. "But she has an excellent idea of duty, this dark-eyed little girl?"

"That is you, Effie, all over!" said the friend. "You always are effacing yourself in favour of someone else. Here you are giving all your tea and sandwiches to a person you have never heard of, and giving up the man you love and who loves you, because——"

"Because it is my duty," said Effie. "Please, Alice, don't let us discuss the matter any longer. It is because I love Guy that I am willing to sacrifice everything for his sake."

"Guy! Bless my soul! Guy!" thought Mrs. Esterhall, sitting suddenly up. "But, of course, there are other Guys than mine in the world."

Just then there was a tremble of the frozen ground under them; a roar and rush of lighted carriages passed them.

"The express at last!" shouted the choleric old gentleman, bobbing up in his seat like an india-rubber ball.

On moved the train at last, creaking and groaning like some monster serpent in pain. Mrs. Esterhall roused herself, and leaned towards the hazel-eyed girl.

"My dear," she said between the throbs of the engine, "is it Guy Esterhall that you are speaking of?"

The girl started and coloured. She could not repress a cry of surprise.

"Yes? I thought so. Come over here and sit by me. I am his mother, and I want to talk to you."

It was two o'clock when they reached Esterhall station, but the closed carriage was waiting for them, with hot foot-warmers and about half a ton of fur cloaks and wrappings. And Effie Dallas stepped into the luxurious conveyance with Mrs. Esterhall, for the old lady had insisted on taking Effie home with her to the manor.

"She is such a contrast in every way to that selfish, cold-hearted Chippendale girl," said Mrs. Esterhall—"I'll telegraph to Guion at once. Really it does seem as if there was a special Providence in our train being kept so long waiting for the express to pass."

As if there is not a "special Providence" in everything that happens in this world of ours!

A Mysterious Clerk

AN advertisement of the following tenor appeared in one of the daily journals of a provincial town some years since:—

"ACCOUNTANT.—The services of an accomplished and competent person are desired by the advertiser to take charge of the books and correspondence of a flourishing business. Liberal salary and permanent position is offered to one with proper credentials. Address,——"

A hundred candidates presented themselves at the establishment of Mr. Corlis, and among the competitors there came a modestly attired person, who, more than the others, seemed, at first sight, acceptable to the proprietor.

The address of this applicant seemed quiet and pleasant. His whole appearance that of an earnest, well-disposed man, who was desirous to get along in the world.

He brought with him, and presented to Mr. Corlis, a few brief letters of recommendation from persons residing in London, and exhibited a draft for a limited sum upon a responsible banking house in the town. His story was simple and straightforward, and his manners were altogether prepossessing. He wrote a fair business hand; his credentials proved satisfactory to the not over-cautious Mr. Corlis, and he was engaged.

Ernest Maywood—for thus the applicant signed his name—proved a model clerk. He must have been some thirty years of age when he entered the employ of Mr. Corlis. He might have been five years younger, perhaps. He reaped the experience of forty, at least, for he was cunning in accounts, and his knowledge of the ramifications of debt and credit was extraordinary.

His varied qualifications were quickly brought into requisition, and his employer very soon came to esteem him for his accuracy in mercantile matters, as well as for the every-day goodness of character that marked his continually upright and honest course of conduct.

Mr. Corlis had a daughter, his only child, in whom were centred all his hopes. The father thought he saw in the character of his new clerk business qualities most desirable, and he believed him to be a man of integrity and worth; and at the end of a twelvemonth he secretly determined upon bringing about an intimacy between Ernest and his daughter, with a view to making him his partner in trade at the fitting moment, and subsequently, if possible, to uniting his daughter with him in marriage.

Maywood had once or twice been the guest of his employer at dinner, where he had been introduced to the fair and agreeable Miss Corlis, and an evening or two had been passed by him at her father's house; but nothing occurred to offer the

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parent a hope that his *employé* had been affected in any wise by his daughter's charms.

Thus the months passed quietly by, Maywood continued on in the same plodding, indefatigable, untiring round of duty, always at his post, ever devoted to his master's interests, and more than satisfying the expectations of the thriving Mr. Corlis, who was fortunate indeed in the selection he had made in his now confidential clerk.

"Ernest," said his employer to him one morning, "I voluntarily increased your salary, a twelvemonth since, because you merited it, though you did not mention the subject yourself. Two years ago to-day you commenced service with me. The balance-sheet exhibits a handsome profit upon the last year's business, to which result you have largely contributed, directly and indirectly. I now propose to offer you an interest in the business, and from this date, if you agree to it, you shall become a partner."

The offer was a liberal one. The income derivable from such a share of the profits would have quintupled Maywood's earnings. On the part of his employer, it was the opening wedge for his future plan of marrying his daughter well, and to his mind. His decision—a declination—instantly, but frankly and kindly given, astounded the generous Mr. Corlis.

Maywood said he was content as he was! His salary was ample, and was a full equivalent for his humble services. He did not desire it increased. He had no use for more money than his place now yielded him. He had no wish to incur additional responsibilities. He was happy, and if Mr. Corlis was satisfied, so was he. And there the matter dropped.

Maywood continued in the performance of his duties, and Mr. Corlis quietly awaited another opportunity to carry out his long-cherished plan in reference to his daughter's prospects; while Miss Corlis lost no fitting occasion to second her parent's views and wishes.

"Time flies with silent wings." A twelvemonth passes away quickly. Another year elapsed without any peculiar change in the relations of the parties about whom we have written.

One day a frightful collision took place at the station close to Mr. Corlis's place of business. He and Maywood were among the first on the scene, and were actively employed in their offices of kindness to the unfortunates, when the figure of a plainly dressed man was brought out writhing in his last agonies.

Mr. Corlis approached him as he came forward in the hands of the men who were removing him, and Maywood followed closely upon the steps of his employer. The fatally injured and dying man opened his eyes as the clerk came up, gazed fearfully at him, and shrieking the broken syllable "May—" expired.

Maywood started back, horror-struck! For an instant he was paralysed! That face and voice—that last glance! The clerk was bewildered, and motionless as a statue—and the body was taken away.

Maywood, in the confusion, fled. Subsequent search for him proved futile. He disappeared altogether, and all efforts to find him, or to learn of his whereabouts or his fate, were alike in vain. After weeks of unavailing inquiry, the belief of his employer settled into no very satisfactory channel (though he feared that Maywood had either met with an accident amid the terrible confusion, or that he must have committed suicide), and his place was filled in the counting-house, while the business of the establishment went on as before.

What disposal the book-keeper had made of his surplus earnings, from time to time, if he had any, or whether he had saved any portion of his pay, was unknown to his late employer. Inquiries were instituted, and all the means at hand likely to afford any light upon the singular and sudden disappearance were availed of—but to no purpose. Maywood was gone!

Six years, with their round of joys and sorrows, pains and pleasures, changes and fortunes, had passed away, after the accident related, when one evening there halted before the door of Mr. Corlis a carriage, from which alighted a lady and gentleman, who inquired if the merchant were at home. They were shown into the drawing-room, and the cards of "Mr. and Mrs. Ervine" were sent up. The name was not familiar, either to Mr. Corlis or his daughter.

"Ervine?" said the father, "Ervine? I do not recognise the name."

Mr. Corlis soon after entered the apartment, followed by his daughter, and the strangers rose to pay their respects.

"Mr. Ervine," said the merchant, "I am happy to meet you; but, really, I do not recollect."

"No," said the stranger, "I never had the pleasure of meeting you before. This is my wife, however," he added, presenting the modestly attired lady who accompanied him. "She says you will probably recollect her."

The lady advanced, offered her hand to Mr. Corlis and his daughter, and said: "Surely, Mr. Corlis, you have not forgotten me?"

"Maywood!" exclaimed father and daughter together.

"You are right," said the lady calmly.

"But how is this?" asked the merchant. "When did this change occur? A woman!"

"Sit down, my dear sir," said the lady calmly, "and I will at once unravel what must have seemed a most mysterious proceeding, in your estimation; but which, under the circumstances, could not be otherwise.

"Nearly twenty years ago I married a man of whom I knew too little, and who proved himself utterly unworthy of the confidence and love of her whom he grossly deceived, before and after our union. His habits were dissolute; he soon became a confirmed inebriate; our prospectively happy home shortly became a scene of continuously riotous dissipation; his little property, with my own, was squandered, and, before five years had passed, we were homeless, penniless, friendless.

"When I could no longer bear up under the cruel treatment to which I was subjected, I made a final appeal to him. In his drunken wrath he forced me violently away from him, and, in despair, I fled from the scene of my early miseries. I adopted my maiden name of Maywood, procured the letters of credence, which you have seen; and, having acquired a knowledge of books and accounts in earlier years, assumed the habiliments of the ruder sex, believing that I could thus better earn a sustenance.

"I came here, entered your service, saved a few pounds, and you remember the terrible occurrence which immediately preceded my disappearance?"

"The accident at the station?"

"Yes; we were hurrying about among the wounded, as you recollect, when the figure of one of the dying sufferers approached us."

"Yes, yes; I remember."

"That man was my husband."

There were tears in the eyes of the little coterie who listened to this singular tale of woe.

"I recognised him, and he half pronounced the name of Mary, my baptismal name, as I hurried about amid the frantic crowd on that fearful occasion. Stunned and bewildered by the trying position in which I thus suddenly found myself placed, and fearful of the results of exposure, I knew not what to do, or scarcely what I did.

"He did not survive the accident, however; and, two hours afterwards, in homely female attire, I claimed his unfortunate remains. None recognised me in my plain apparel, and surely none could suspect that the veiled and humble woman who followed the corpse to its last resting-place was in fact the book-keeper of the well-known Mr. Corlis.

"I left town forthwith. Through your kindness and liberality I had been able to lay by a considerable sum of money, and I departed for the West, and, once more among total strangers, I continued the resumption of the habiliments and habits of my sex. With the means at my command, I continued to live quietly and respectably, until some two years ago I met this gentleman, who offered me his hand. I am now Mrs. Ervine, and this is my husband, sir."

As may well be imagined, a happy reunion succeeded this *dénouement* of the long-time mystery which had shrouded the sudden disappearance of Mr. Corlis's book-keeper. And the reader may be assured that Mr. and Mrs. Ervine were not only very welcome in the rich merchant's family, but that the newly wedded pair became the future fast friends of "Maywood's" former employer and his extended social circle.

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I, THOMAS HOOPER, was a rolling stone; but still I had gathered some moss in my ramblings. The following incident in my career is as fresh in my memory as when it happened some sixteen years ago.

At the age of eighteen, having an intense longing to see something of the world, I had taken French leave of my master, to whom I was apprenticed, and with my savings had gone to Australia.

With this short preamble I will jump over fifteen years of my life in Australia, where I roamed about over the country, at times doing very well indeed. Towards the end of 1870 I found myself in Melbourne, with a little over £500 in hard cash—the fortune I had accumulated.

That longing to see the old country again, which had often attacked me during those long years, came over me once more with irresistible force, and I determined to go home; so I took passage on board a steamer.

We had not been many days out before I chummed on to a true-bred squatter, who was on a visit to England. He was a tall, lantern-jawed man, with a full black beard and pale eyes, ever on the look-out, as it were, for the main chance, but, as I subsequently found out, as honest and straightforward a man as ever lived.

About the fifth day out a nasty spirit of inactivity stole over me—a doing-nothing kind of feeling. It seemed a shame to be spending the time so idly, and with no chance of making money, so I strolled up to the colonial and asked him if he would play; a truly nice way to get out of my difficulty.

"Yes, I'm game," was the reply. "Poker, euchre. What's your weakness?"

I shook my head and said, "What say you to cribbage?"

"Well, 'tis a quietish game, but I'm your man to what tune you like."

Feeling proud of my money, and thinking to frighten him, I said boldly, "To the tune of £500."

Not a muscle moved in his face, as he coolly went to his berth and returned with a bundle of notes.

This was decidedly unexpected, but I would not withdraw, and we both solemnly sat down at the table.

I had always been considered a good cribbage player, and I knew the game thoroughly. Of course, I wished to play the five-card game, but the Australian said he much preferred the six-card, "because there was more scoring."

To save time we decided to toss for choice, and I lost.

I began coolly and played carefully, but the luck the squatter experienced in his cribs was something marvellous, and upset all my calculations. Gradually, under the influence of tobacco-smoke, wine, and spirits, combined with my ill-luck, I played recklessly, and I rose from the table a loser of no less than the enormous sum of £150.

With head splitting, eyes burning, and hands clammy with perspiration, I rushed on deck into the fresh air. When I retired to my berth sleep would not visit me. Tossing and tumbling in my berth I formed many plans to retrieve the loss of my hard-earned money.

I had often noticed in my ups and downs through life, when apparently in the most hopeless straits, something or other was sure to turn up and make a fairy-like change in my fortune. So I did not give way entirely to despair.

Next morning I had a cold bath, took plenty of exercise, and, in fact, did everything to steady and brace my nerves for a struggle with my successful antagonist.

Well, ultimately we sat down, and I think I somewhat astonished Mr. Squatter by saying, "Sir, I have lost a deal of money, and I want to get it back. I will play you for £100, the best two out of three games."

Slowly removing his cigar from his mouth, he cried, "Done."

How my heart palpitated, though I was cool outwardly. My spirits rose when I won the first game of the rubber pretty smartly, but the second fell to the Australian after a close game. In the third my ill-luck returned, and I suffered defeat. With trembling hands I handed over the money.

"Now, friend," said the squatter, "I like your pluck. It's agin my principles, but for once I'll go you double or quits, £500 or nothing."

This completely staggered me. As a card-player I knew it was a good offer. But, then, if I lost, could I live to face misery and perhaps starvation in the old country.

I went on deck and tried to think calmly and seriously over my position. At last, with a face as pale as death and clenched hands, I resolved to do or die. I went below again, and said I would play—aye, play perchance for life itself. One game only. £500 or death.

We tossed for deal; the Australian won, and the game proceeded. His luck seemed never to desert him. Hope was fast leaving me. The cards laughed at me; the picture cards smiled in derision, until my brain seemed as if it would give way. I was even deliberating in my mind whether to jump overboard or to end existence with a pistol-shot.

The game was drawing to a close. It was the Australian's crib.

Although the holes in the board were dancing to and fro, I found he only wanted six for game, and I the apparently impossible number of thirty.

Mechanically picking up my cards, I found my hand to consist of the fives of hearts, clubs, and spades, the knaves of diamonds and spades, and the two of hearts.

My heart gave a great jump, for I knew the biggest hand at cribbage could be made of such cards. I saw my cool friend opposite smiling with satisfaction.

Instinctively I threw away the knave of spades and the two of hearts.

With a hand that trembled as it never trembled before, I cut—great heavens!—the very card, the five of diamonds. How I shivered and shook with excitement. I still wanted to make one hole, and my opponent would in every probability play out with such cards as mine against him.

My heart was beating like a sledge-hammer. I could stand the fearful tension no longer. I shouted for a glass of brandy, which was swallowed at a gulp. This invigorated me, and I tried to calm myself until my very chest seemed bursting.

I played my knave.

"A pair—two," was the response. Four holes now. I played one of my fives.

"And six is thirty-one."

Only two more holes and I was a lost man. I had only my two remaining fives, and the odds seemed great that my opponent had a tenth card of some kind left.

I shall never forget the moment when I put the card down, and in a voice I could not recognise as mine, said, "Five."

The Australian only had a three left. Saved! I threw down my remaining five, and scored the necessary one for last card.

How hysterically I showed my hand, how the tears ran down my cheeks; what my feelings were, or what I did, I cannot tell. I know that five was the last card I ever played.

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